

**ISSN** INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER

ISSN-2321-7065

**IJELLH**

# International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal



**Volume 7, Issue 3, March 2019**

[www.ijellh.com](http://www.ijellh.com)

M.Kohila

Research Scholar,

Bharathiar University,

Coimbatore, India

Email:kohisatha2005@gmail.com

Dr.Rachel Anne Selvaraj

Associate Professor,

Nanjil Catholic College of Arts and Science,

Kalikkavilai, Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu, India

rachelslvvj@yahoo.co.in

### Terrorism and the Creation of Discord: A Study of the Select Novels of Bharati

Mukherjee

#### Abstract

Bharati Mukherjee has written eight novels and two collections of short stories as well as two non-fictional works. Her basic themes centre around the heterogeneity of immigrant experience. However, she is one of the first novelists who have explored the compounding impact of the terrorist activities on individual lives. Culture collisions can be negotiated, but terrorist activities totally throws individual lives out of balance. Terrorism has impacted the world in a big way. It has become an enormous force in individual lives. Terrorist activities find a place in *The Tiger's Daughter*, *Jasmine*, *Desirable Daughters* and also *Miss New India*. In *The Tiger's Daughter*, the protagonist is caught in the protest movement sponsored by Naxalite ideology. In the novel *Jasmine*, the protagonist loses her

idealistic husband to a bomb attack masterminded by the Khalistani outfit. In *Desirable Daughters*, criminal terrorism is discussed. Criminal terrorists target wealthy families and terrorize them in order to take the wealth from them. In *Miss New India*, a terrorist attempt to steal identity is exposed. Overcoming the discords created by terrorism is still a challenging phenomenon.

Key Words: Terrorism, technology, psyche, identity

Contemporary society has been shaped by the technological revolution, but insidiously it is also being shaped by another force namely terrorism which has crept in complicating the lives of people and creating multiple discords. Terrorism in India involves religious terrorism and political terrorism. Along with this is a mean kind of terrorist activity masterminded by criminal gangs. This kind of discord affects families and individuals. It is significant that Mukherjee is not inclined to analyze in great detail, the causes or emergence of the various kinds of terrorisms operating in India and spreading its tentacles across the globe. As a novelist, Mukherjee is almost one of the first few to analyze the fall out of this contemporary phenomenon which has created deep discords in the lives of people. Psyches affected by terrorist activities thrust and impel the protagonists on courses they had not hitherto trod upon.

Mukherjee's *Jasmine* opens in a small Punjab Village of Hasnapur. Jasmine's life gets seriously affected by the extremist organization Khalsa Lions. In *Jasmine*, Mukherjee introduces the Khalistan movement. The Khalistan movement was a Sikh separatist's movement, which sought to create a separate country called Khalistan. The Khalistanis were responsible for a number of terrorist acts in northern India. They had felt betrayed by all parties after Partition, with their homeland split between India and Pakistan, rendering them a tiny minority in both countries. Mukerjee's fiction consistently depicts the rise of forces like the Marxist Naxalites and the Sikh separatists as destructive.

Mukherjee's novel, *Jasmine* is about the ways in which a woman negotiates matters of identity and agency within a socio-political condition. Jasmine was the name given her by her husband Prakash. He had changed her name from Jyoti to Jasmine. It is a symbol of her abiding love for his memory that this is the name by which the novel is known. Prakash becomes Jyoti's Professor Higgins, who is the mentor in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*. He helps her to reinvent herself as a sophisticated young urban woman. He pushes her toward regarding herself as his equal. It is her modernization at his hands that outrages Sukwinder and ironically leads to her husband's death. The young fanatic tries to assassinate her, partly because she is abandoning the traditionally more modest Salwar kameez for a stylish, more revealing sari.

Sukwinder Singh is a terrorist belonging to the Khalsa Lions. He is one of the Khalsa boys who do not hesitate to kill the non-Sikhs of his own village. He gravely outlines their plan: "The Khalsa, the Pure-Bodied and Pure-Hearted, must have their sovereign state. Khalistan, the Land of the Pure. The impure must be eliminated" (J 65). He warns Jasmine's brothers either to leave the place or to become Sikhs in order to save their lives. He warns them because they are his friends and fellow villagers. He says, "You must leave, or be killed. Renounce all filth and idolatry. Do not eat meat, smoke tobacco, or drink alcohol or cut your hair. Wear a turban and then you will be welcome" (J 65).

Under the dictates of their leader Bhindranwale, they call "all Hindu women whores all Hindu men rapists" (J 65) and to them the Hindu practice of wearing saris was a sign of prostitution. Prakash, Jasmine's would be husband tries to bring Sukhwinder to his senses. He tries to tell him and persuade him that there is no Hindu state or Sikh state. India is for everyone. He asks him to remember what the Muslims did to the Sikhs and what the Muslims did to the Gurus. In this way he tries to use past history to bring Sukhwinder to his senses. But fellows like Sukkhi have been systematically indoctrinated so that they are not able to

apply their common sense or rationality and can only put forward a fictitious tale as an argument for their vengeance against the Hindus.

It would appear from the novel that the Khalsa Lions are extremists interested only in spreading mindless violence. One particular day when Jasmine was shopping with her husband they are attacked. Jasmine is the first to see the miscreants in the mirror of the shop:

Two Lions, one of them carrying a music box, lounged on the doorway. And then behind them something moved, a slight man on a motor scooter (...). The Lions had left the music box just inside the door (...). I am screaming. My hands touch a red wet cheek, my eyes are closed. Prakash and I stumble together (...). I failed you. I didn't get there soon enough. The bomb was meant for me, prostitute, whore (J 93).

But innocent Prakash gets killed accidentally in a bomb blast engineered by Sukhwinder Singh. Actually the bomb is not meant for Prakash but for the Hindu women shopping inside a sari shop.

As a result of Sukwinder's action Jasmine loses her husband and develops a deep sense of guilt. She also develops a deep sense of resolve to go to the US and burn her husband's clothes on the campus of the University where he had wanted to study. The terrorist attack unbalances the equations of her life and she travels to the US as an illegal immigrant. In the course of her stay in the US, when she starts feeling comfortable with Taylor and his daughter and starts dreaming of a future for herself, she sees Sukwinder Singh on the streets of New York selling hotdogs. He was one of the most wanted criminals in India. But he was walking around scot free in the US! When she sees him, her first reaction is to flee. Thus once again she becomes unsettled in her mind, and leaves Taylor without a message, and goes far away from him and personal happiness. Jasmine's reaction to flee summarizes her inability to confront the terrorist because she realizes that the only protection

for her and possibly for Taylor is for her to flee. Fear is the response with which she is overwhelmed.

In *Tiger's Daughter* the perspective of the Naxalite movement presented in the novel is the predicament of those who either directly or indirectly bears the brunt of the movement. In the novel, naxal terrorism is portrayed as more destructive than revolutionary. Mukherjee systematically undermines the ideology of the revolutionary. Mukherjee emphasizes loss and destruction. The whole movement is presented through the eyes of those who either personally or individually has been at the receiving end during the turmoil. The fracturing effects of the movement resonate throughout the novel. The movement is itself trivialized as puerile rather than militant in the consciousness of Tara and her friends. The demonstrations, the processions etc. are nothing more than a mere spectacle to them. Mukherjee appears far more interested in the threatened section.

The challenge that these Naxalites pose to the dominant sociopolitical structure has been dealt only in terms of the fear it produces. When Tara returns to Calcutta, it was the time when the Naxalite unrest was plaguing Bengal. The Naxalite movement had entered the most intense phase. The Naxalites were militant in nature belonging to the Marxist Communist Party of India. They believed in armed revolution and their main grievance was the unequal distribution of resources. In Naxalbari there was a peasant uprising which triggered other peasant struggles all over West Bengal, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. In Calcutta, the student and youth led the uprising.

Tara is caught in the cross fire between the protestors and the government. The sense of alienation that she feels after coming to India is further aggravated by the political terrorism that she sees, hears and experiences. She wants to go back to her husband in the US and when she is driving towards the airport she is enmeshed in a mob of violent protestors. Mukherjee explores many such situations in a number of her novels where her protagonists

encounter violence perpetuated by others and she studies a change that comes into their personalities as a result of their encounter with violence. Helplessness and the inability to negotiate within their circumstances characterize the protagonists who become victims of terrorist activity.

Mukherjee introduces the Dawood gang in *Desirable Daughter*. Dawood Ibrahim Kaskar, the notorious criminal was born in Dongri in Mumbai. After being implicated in the Bombay blasts, he escaped arrest in India and went to Dubai. He currently resides in Karachi and is the head of the crime syndicate D-company which he established in the 1970's. He has been involved in various kinds of crimes including extortion, terrorism, drug trafficking, targeted killing and murder. He is considered a global terrorist.

Unlike her other two sisters, Tara's marriage is an arranged marriage. Bishwapriya Chatterjee, an entrepreneur is the perfect boy from an affluent family. After their marriage, they move to America where Bish establishes and flourishes in his CHATTY communications. He grows up to be a Silicon Valley expert, wealthy and famous and is considered to be "a poster-boy of Indian entrepreneurship (DD 26). Like Dimple, Tara anticipates "liberating promise of marriage, travel and a wider world" (DD 81) which lie beyond Ballygunj Park. Like Amit, Bish is a conventional Indian husband who provides all the material comforts to his family except love. He dislikes Tara going for a job and wishes her to be his own princess. Since her promising life is not fulfilled, she exhibits her rebellious spirit and leaves Bish, along with her son Rabi and lives-in with Andy, a retrofitter and yoga instructor.

One day when Tara returns, she finds Christopher Dey holding a familial conference with her son Rabi in the drawing room and making himself at home. She is filled with horror and disbelief when he introduces himself as her cousin and talks to her in Bengali about common acquaintances, sights and people of Calcutta. He says that he is the son of her elder



sister Padma and Ronald Dey. He produces a letter to Tara which is allegedly written by Ronald Dey and asks her to contact her elder sister wherever she lives for clarification. He mentions that he obtained Tara's address from Parvati, her sister in Bombay. After sending the man away, Tara talks to her sister Parvati in Bombay. Parvati says that she has not met any person like Christopher Dey, so there is no question of giving Tara's address to anyone. Tara is deeply shocked by the revelation that her sister had a son before wed lock in her early years in Calcutta.

Tara suspects that the man posing to be Padma's son must be a criminal trying to blackmail the family and extort money. Driven to the edge of her nerves, she writes a letter directly to the alleged father in Bombay and encloses a copy of his letter for confirmation. When Tara calls Padma, she dodges the pointed questions which leave Tara with a strong impression about the existence of the hidden premarital affair. The letter from Ronald Dey confirms that his and Padma's child was given to an orphanage, as marriage between members of two different castes and class was inconceivable at that time. Ronald Dey further writes that his son had left for San Francisco for higher education. He gives two important details regarding his son Christopher being tall about 6 feet and his regrettable lack of knowledge of Bengali. The details confirm Tara's fears, because the man who had presented himself in her house posing to be Christopher had been short and spoke fluent Bengali. She becomes convinced in her mind that he was a fraud with criminal intent.

Tara finds to her mounting anxiety and worry, that her son had been meeting with the fellow and had taken a liking to him. She seeks Andy's protection and also warns Bish, her ex-husband to watch out. Andy warns her and says, "The unscrupulous forces in this country and abroad would seek to destroy, the incautious and the innocent" (DD 129). To Tara's relief, Rabi changes his opinion of Christopher Dey, after a few meetings. He gives his revised opinion casually to his mother, "I don't think he is who he says he is" (DD 156). On



close questioning, he tells her that he had seen him hustling money and drugs. Tara is now truly alarmed. She recalls Ronald Dey's reference in his letter to Tennyson's poem *The Kraken* and fears that the monster is breaking through the ocean's surface and there will soon be death and destruction.

Tara asks Andy to respond to any call for help, as she thinks that her life might be in danger. On Andy's advice, she alerts her husband who is vacationing in Australia with their son. Tara seeks the help of Jasbir Singh, the office of the ethnic squad FBI against Andy's advice. Infuriated, Andy packs off and leaves her. To get to the bottom of the story, Tara flies to New Jersey to her sister Padma. Whenever Tara tries to bring up the topic, she diverts Tara's attention. She starts talking about her great frustration and disappointment in not being permitted by her father to go into film acting. Neither the news of her former lover Ronald Dey's death in Bombay, nor her son Christopher Dey's death under mysterious circumstances evoke any emotion in Padma. It is as though the illegitimate child and secret affair had never happened. While Tara is in New Jersey, the police work continues in San Francisco. They first suspect Andy, her lover and arrest him under the belief that he might be trying to make money by taking advantage of a helpless divorced woman.

After returning from New Jersey, Tara finds out through the FBI agent Jack Sidhu that the stranger who visited her house in the guise of Chris Dey is Abbas Sattar Hai, a member of the notorious Bombay – based Dawood criminal gang. He was involved in the act of murdering or blackmailing affluent Indo-American families to gain sponsors for his illegal mission. The police officer explained how this Abbas entered her home in the name of Chris Dey. The real Christopher Dey, Padma's son when finally informed of his parentage by his father had decided to travel to the United States to meet his mother. Possessing only his Aunt Tara's address in San Francisco, he had come to the Bay Area. While there he ran into the criminal Abbas Sattar Hai, who murdered him and assumed his identity and gained entry into

Tara's house with a letter purportedly from Ron Dey, explaining the circumstances of his birth. The police officer Sidhu informed Tara that her entire family was under threat and put them on high alert.

The Indian family system is based on the mutual trust and protection from the external danger. Bish too was programmed to defend his family from hazardous situations. When Tara reveals the threat from Abbas Sattar Hai, Bish comes to her rescue. Bish's deep understanding of Tara's deep shock and grief over the Chris Dey episode, leads her to realize that the essential difference in social and cultural outlook can never be bridged. In contrast, Andras Karolyi had a completely different reaction; ultimately breaking up with Tara, unable to deal with complications. Tara realizes early on through the reactions of American women to her arranged marriage, "I'll never be a modern woman" (DD 27).

Tara's realization of their cultural bond rekindles Tara's love for Bish. They talk over their past and are prepared to restore their family. Unexpectedly, at that moment, there is a huge bomb blast in Tara's house. Rabi, who was sleeping in the ground floor, felt a voice calling for him and had just left the room when the bomb exploded. He joined his parents at the right moment. Bish, in his effort to safeguard Tara from the fire, lost his feet which were all blistered due to the accident. The three of them, Bish, Tara and Rabi miraculously survive, but Bish is badly burned and required months of surgery and physiotherapy.

The reason for the bomb explosion was to target Bish's CHATTY, to destroy and upset the world economy. The bomb was part of an international globalised criminal network and the aim was financial. The false Chris was the product of a world in which it was easy to make global connections. Communications were swift and no border was impenetrable.

Mukherjee herself has good reason to be aware of the transnationality of crime. In *The Sorrow and the Terror* (on the 1985 Air India bombing), she drew attention to the world-wide Sikh fundraising and cyber terrorism and to the laxness of airport security. As a result she

found herself stalked and under death threat for two years. Globalization connects the Indian Dawood gang across the globe, threatening security and destroying identities. Fundamentalism can exploit the same networks and synergies. If traditionalism can be transposed into radical revolt (like the Tree Bride), modern globalization can do the reverse, hand in glove with the forces of coercive and fundamentalist tradition. Technology and terrorism thus converge.

In the final part of *Desirable Daughters*, Tara stands in a San Francisco street, watching her house go up in flames. She stands along with her teenage son, Rabi and ex-husband Bish. She was lucky to be alive barely escaping what turned out to be a bomb set to kill. After the bomb blast, Tara is deeply traumatized by the terrorist attack and returns to India, so as to reevaluate the Hindu customs that had shaped her and her family. The novel comes to the happy end with a family reunion.

In *Miss New India*, Anjali is duped and taken advantage of by a woman called Husseina in Bagehot house. Anjali lives as a boarder in Bagehot house and meets other young women like herself working and living in Bangalore. Husseina is also a boarder there. She is the same height and colouring as Anjali. She befriends Anjali and on a particular day she tells Anjali that she is leaving and donates all her fashionable clothes to Anjali before she leaves. After her disappearance, the police come and arrest Anjali suddenly. It is that time that she realizes that the other girl was a wanted terrorist who had escaped the police net by stealing Anjali's identity. There was no way for Anjali to prove her innocence and she is cast into jail. After a period of time, Mr.GG intervenes for her to be released and she is helped by Rabi's people to recover and recuperate. The criminal had targeted her in a systematic way in order to steal her identity and had succeeded in throwing her life completely out of balance.

Terror and violence brought about by terrorist outfits around the world become part of Mukherjee's fictional world. In *The Tiger's Daughter*, she focuses on Naxalites, who gained

a strong presence among the students in Calcutta in 1971. In *Jasmine*, she focuses on Sikh terrorism which rocked India in the 1980s. In *Desirable Daughters*, Mukherjee introduces Abbas Sattar Hai, who is from the Dawood gang, the international terrorist in the story. This is Mukherjee's way of showing how violence and terrorist activity has become an integral part of our existence in the contemporary world.

Violence, unsought, unexpected, undeserved rocks the lives of people today. Discord is the condition of life caused by multiple phenomenon enmeshed with the advancement of technology. Discord is caused not only by cross cultural confrontations creating discomfiture, not only through controlling behaviors of one gender over another, not only through psychosis and neurosis but also by mindless crime and cruel indoctrinations.

### References

- Mukherjee, Bharati. *The Tiger's Daughter*. New Delhi: Penguin India, 1990.
- Mukherjee, Bharati. *Jasmine*. New Delhi: Penguin India, 1990.
- Mukherjee, Bharati. *Desirable Daughters*. New Delhi; Raksha Pvt.Ltd. 2003. Print.
- Mukherjee, Bharati. *Miss New India*. New Delhi: Rupa Publication India Pvt. Ltd., 2012.
- Dayal, Samir. Creating, "Preserving, Destroying: Violence in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*"
- Clifford, J. Morgan, et.al. *Introduction to Psychology*. New Delhi: Tata McGraw, 1997. Print.
- Nityanandam, I., 2000. *Three Great Indian Women Novelists: Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Bharati Mukherjee*, Creative Books, New Delhi, pp.63-79
- Latha, T., 2014. "Journey Motif in Bharati Mukherjee's *Miss New India*", International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature, 2 (4):37-39.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Bharati Mukherjee's *Miss New India*", Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal, III (III): 155-160, Retrieved from <http://www.galaxyimrj.com>